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OF  
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## SERMON XXIII.

On Enthusiasm.

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St. JOHN, xv. 5.

—*For without me, ye can do nothing.*

OUR Saviour, in the former part of the verse, having told his disciples,—That he was the vine, and that they were only banches;—intimating, in what a degree their good fruits, as well as the success of all their endeavours, were to depend upon his communications with them;—he closes the illustration with the inference from it, in the words of

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the text,—For without me, ye can do nothing.—In the 11th chapter to the Romans, where the manner is explained in which a Christian stands by faith,—there is a like illustration made use of, and probably with an eye to this,—where St. Paul instructs us,—that a good man stands as the branch of a wild olive does, when it is grafted into a good olive tree; and that is,—it flourishes not through its own virtue, but in virtue of the root,—and such a root as is naturally not its own.

It is very remarkable in that passage,—that the apostle calls a bad man a wild olive *tree*;—not barely a branch (as in the other case), but a tree, which having a root of its





## SERMON XXIII. §

own, supports itself, and stands in its own strength, and brings forth its own fruit.—And so does every bad man in respect of the wild and sour fruit of a vicious and corrupt heart.—According to the resemblance,—if the apostle intended it,—he is a tree,—has a root of his own,—and fruitfulness, such as it is, with a power to bring it forth without help. But in respect of religion, and the moral improvements of virtue and goodness,—the apostle calls us, and reason tells us we are no more than a branch; and all our fruitfulness, and all our support,—depend so much upon the influence and communications of God,—that without him we can do nothing,—as our

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Saviour declares in the text.—There is scarce any point in our religion wherein men have run into such violent extremes as in the senses given to this, and such like declarations in Scripture,—of our sufficiency being of God;—some understanding them so, as to leave no meaning at all in them;—others,—too much:—the one interpreting the gifts and influences of the spirit, so as to destroy the truth of all such promises and declarations in the gospel;—the other carrying their notions of them so high, as to destroy the reason of the gospel itself,—and render the christian religion, which consists of sober and consistent doctrines,—the most intoxicated,—the most wild

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and unintelligible institution that ever was in the world.

This being premised, I know not how I can more seasonably engage your attention this day, than by a short examination of each of these errors;—in doing which, as I shall take some pains to reduce both the extremes of them to reason,—it will necessarily lead me, at the same time, to mark the safe and true doctrine of our church, concerning the promised influences and operations of the spirit of God upon our hearts;—which, however depreciated through the first mistake,—or boasted of beyond measure through the second,—must nevertheless be so limited and understood,—as, on one hand, to make

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the gospel of Christ consistent with itself,—and, on the other, to make it consistent with reason and common sense.

If we consider the many express declarations, wherein our Saviour tells his followers, before his crucifixion,—That God would send his spirit the comforter amongst them, to supply his place in their hearts;—and, as in the text,—that without him, they could do nothing:—if we conceive them as spoken to his disciples with an immediate view to the emergencies they were under, from their *natural* incapacities of finishing the great work he had left them, and building upon that large foundation he had laid,—without some extraor-



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dinary help and guidance to carry them through,—no one can dispute that evidence and confirmation which was after given of its truth;—as our Lord's disciples were illiterate men, consequently unskilled in the arts and acquired ways of persuasion.—Unless this want had been supplied,—the first obstacle to their labours must have discouraged and put an end to them for ever.—As they had no language but their own, without the gift of tongues they could not have preached the gospel except in Judea;—and as they had no authority of their own,—without the supernatural one of signs and wonders,—they could not vouch for the truth of it beyond the limits where it was first

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transacted.—In this work, doubtless, all their sufficiency and power of acting was immediately from God;—his holy spirit, as he had promised them, so it gave them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist.—So that without him,—without these extraordinary gifts, in the most literal sense of the words, they *could* do nothing.—But besides this plain application of the text to those particular persons and times, when God's spirit was poured down in that signal manner held sacred to this day,—there is something in them to be extended further, which christians of all ages,—and, I hope, of all denominations, have still a claim and trust in,

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—and that is, the ordinary assistance and influences of the spirit of God in our hearts, for moral and virtuous improvements;—these, both in their natures as well as intentions, being altogether different from the others above mentioned conferred upon the disciples of our Lord.—The one were miraculous gifts,—in which the endowed person contributed nothing, which advanced human nature above itself, and raised all its projectile springs above their fountains; enabling them to speak and act such things, and in such manner, as was impossible for men not inspired and preternaturally upheld.—In the other case, the helps spoken of were the influences of God's spirit, which up-

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held us from falling below the dignity of our nature :—that divine assistance which graciously kept us from falling, and enabled us to perform the holy professions of our religion.— Though these are equally called spiritual gifts,—they are not, as in the first case, the entire works of the spirit,—but the calm co-operations of it with our own endeavours ; and are ordinarily what every sincere and well-disposed christian has reason to pray for, and expect from the same fountain of strength,—who has promised to give his holy spirit to them that ask it.

From this point, which is the true doctrine of our church,—the two parties begin to divide both from it and



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each other;—each of them equally misapplying these passages of Scripture, and wresting them to extremes equally pernicious.—

To begin with the first; of whom, should you inquire the explanation and meaning of this or of other texts,—wherein the assistance of God's grace and holy spirit is implied as necessary to sanctify our nature, and enable us to serve and please God—They will answer,—That no doubt all our parts and abilities are the gifts of God,—who is the original author of our nature,—and, of consequence, of all that belongs thereto.—*That as by him we live, and move, and have our being,*—we must in course depend upon him for all our actions whatso-

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ever,—since we must depend upon him even for our life, and for every moment of its continuance.—That from this view of our state and natural dependence, it is certain they will say,—We can do nothing without his help.—But then they will add,—that it concerns us no farther as *christians*, than as we are *men* :—the sanctity of our lives, the religious habits and improvements of our hearts, in no other sense depending upon God, than the most indifferent of our actions, or the natural exercise of any of the other powers he has given us.—Agreeably with this,—that the spiritual gifts spoken of in Scripture, are to be understood by way of accommodation, to signify the natural or

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acquired gifts of a man's mind;—such as memory, fancy, wit and eloquence; which, in a strict and philosophical sense, may be called spiritual;—because they transcend the mechanical powers of matter,—and proceed more or less from the rational soul, which is a spiritual substance.

Whether these ought, in propriety, to be called spiritual gifts, I shall not contend, as it seems a mere dispute about words;—but it is enough that the interpretation cuts the knot, instead of untying it; and, besides, explains away all kind of meaning in the above promises.—And the error of them seems to arise, in the first place, from not distinguishing that

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these spiritual gifts—if they must be called so,—such as memory, fancy, and wit, and other endowments of the mind which are known by the name of natural parts, belong merely to us as men;—and whether the different degrees, by which we excel each other in them, arise from a natural difference of our souls,—or a happier disposition of the organical parts of us.—They are such, however, as God originally bestows upon us, and with which, in a great measure, we are sent into the world. But the moral gifts of the Holy Ghost,—which are more commonly called the fruits of the spirit,—cannot be confined within this description.—We come not into the world equipt



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with virtues, as we do with talents;  
—if we did, we should come into  
the world with that which robbed  
virtue of its best title both to present  
commendation and future reward.—  
The gift of continency depends not,  
as these affirm, upon a mere coldness  
of the constitution—or patience and  
humility from an insensibility of it;  
—but they are virtues insensibly  
wrought in us by the endeavours of  
our own wills and concurrent influ-  
ences of a gracious agent;—and the  
religious improvements arising from  
thence, are so far from being the  
effects of nature, and a fit dispo-  
sition of the several parts and organi-  
cal powers given us,—that the con-  
trary is true;—namely,—that the

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stream of our affections and appetites but too naturally carries us the other way.—For this, let any man lay his hand upon his heart, and reflect what has past within him, in the several conflicts of meekness,—temperance,—chastity, and other self-denials,—and he will need no better argument for his conviction.

This hint leads to the true answer to the above misinterpretation of the text,—That we depend upon God in no other sense for our virtues—than we necessarily do for every thing else; and that the fruits of the spirit are merely the determinations and efforts of our own reason,—and as much our own accomplishments, as any

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other improvements are the effect of our own diligence and industry.

This account, by the way, is opposite to the apostle's;—who tells us,—It is GOD that worketh in us both to do and will, of his good pleasure.—It is true,—though we are born ignorant,—we can make ourselves skilful;—we can acquire arts and sciences by our own application and study.—But the case is not the same in respect of goodness.—We can acquire arts and sciences, because we lie under no natural indisposition or backwardness to that acquirement.—For nature, though it be corrupt, yet still it is curious and busy after knowledge.—But it does not appear, that to goodness and sanctity of manners

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we have the same natural propensity.—Lusts within, and temptations without, set up so strong a confederacy against it, as we are never able to surmount by our own strength.—However firmly we may think we stand,—the best of us are but upheld, and graciously kept upright; and whenever this divine assistance is withdrawn,—or suspended,—all history, especially the sacred, is full of melancholy instances of what man is, when God leaves him to himself,—that he is even a thing of nought.

Whether it was from a conscious experience of this truth in themselves,—or some traditions handed from the Scripture account of it;—or that it was, in some measure, de-



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ducible from the principles of reason,—in the writings of some of the wisest of the heathen philosophers, we find the strongest traces of the persuasion of God's assisting men to virtue and probity of manners.—One of the greatest masters of reasoning amongst the ancients acknowledges, that nothing great and exalted can be atchieved, *sine divino afflatu*;—and Seneca, to the same purpose.—*nulla mens bona sine Deo*;—that no soul can be good without divine assistance.—Now whatever comments may be put upon such passages in their writings,—it is certain those in Scripture can receive no other, to be consistent with themselves, than what has been given.—And though, in

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vindication of human liberty, it is as certain on the other hand,—that education, precepts, examples, pious inclinations, and practical diligence, are great and meritorious advances towards a religious state;—yet the state itself is got and finished by God's grace; and the concurrence of his spirit upon tempers thus happily predisposed,—and honestly making use of such fit means;—and unless thus much is understood from them,—the several expressions in Scripture, where the offices of the Holy Ghost, conducive to this end, are enumerated;—such as cleansing, guiding, renewing, comforting, strengthening and establishing us,—are a set of unintelligible words,

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which may amuse, but can convey little light to the understanding.

This is all I have time left to say at present upon the first error of those, who, by too loose an interpretation of the gifts and fruits of the spirit, explain away the whole sense and meaning of them, and thereby render not only the promises, but the comforts of them too, of none effect.—Concerning which error, I have only to add this by way of extenuation of it,—that I believe the great and unedifying rout made about sanctification and regeneration in the middle of the last century,—and the enthusiastic extravagances into which the communications of the spirit have been carried by so many

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deluded or deluding people in this, are two of the great causes which have driven many a sober man into the opposite extreme, against which I have argued. Now if the dread of favouring too much of religion in their interpretations has done this ill service,—let us inquire, on the other hand, whether the affectation of too *much* religion in the other extreme, has not misled others full as far from truth, and further from the reason and sobriety of the gospel, than the first.

I have already proved by Scripture arguments, that the influence of the holy spirit of God is necessary to render the imperfect sacrifice of our obedience pleasing to our Maker,



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He hath promised to *perfect his strength in our weakness*.—With this assurance we ought to be satisfied;—especially since our Saviour hath thought proper to mortify all scrupulous inquiries into operations of this kind, by comparing them to the wind, *which bloweth where it listeth; and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth*:—so is every one that is *born of the spirit*.—Let humble gratitude acknowledge the effect, unprompted by an idle curiosity to explain the cause.

We are told, without this assistance, we can do nothing;—we are told, from the same authority, we can do all through Christ that strengthens

us.—We are commanded to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*. The reason immediately follows; *for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure*.—From these, and many other repeated passages, it is evident, that the assistances of grace were not intended to destroy, but to co-operate with the endeavours of man,—and are derived from God in the same manner as all natural powers.—Indeed, without this interpretation, how could the Almighty address himself to man as a rational being?—how could his actions be his own?—how could he be considered as a blameable or rewardable creature?

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From this account of the consistent opinions of a sober-minded christian, let us take a view of the mistaken enthusiast.—See him ostentatiously clothed with the outward garb of sanctity, to attract the eyes of the vulgar.—See a cheerful demeanour, the natural result of an easy and self-applauding heart, studiously avoided as criminal.—See his countenance overspread with a melancholy gloom and despondence—as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of fullness and discontent.—Hear him pouring forth his pharisaical ejaculations on his journey, or in the streets.—Hear him boasting of extraordinary communications

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with the God of all knowledge, and at the same time offending against the common rules of his own native language, and the plainer dictates of common sense.—Hear him arrogantly thanking his God, that he is not as other men are; and, with more than papal uncharitableness, very liberally allotting the portion of the damned, to every christian whom he, partial judge, deems less perfect than himself—to every christian who is walking on in the paths of duty with sober vigilance, aspiring to perfection by progressive attainments, and seriously endeavouring, through a rational faith in his Redeemer, to make his calling and election sure.



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There have been no sects in the christian world, however absurd, which have not endeavoured to support their opinions by arguments drawn from Scripture, misinterpreted or misapplied.

We had a melancholy instance of this in our own country, in the last century,—when the church of Christ, as well as the government, during that period of national confusion, was torn asunder into various sects and factions;—when some men pretended to have Scripture precepts, parables, or prophecies to plead, in favour of the most impious absurdities that falsehood could advance. The same spirit which prevailed amongst the fanatics, seems

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to have gone forth among these modern enthusiasts.—Faith, the distinguishing characteristic of a christian, is defined by them not as a rational assent of the understanding, to truths which are established by indisputable authority, but as a violent persuasion of mind, that they are instantaneously become the children of God—that the whole score of their sins is for ever blotted out, without the payment of one tear of repentance.—Pleasing doctrine this to the fears and passions of mankind!—promising fair to gain proselytes of the vicious and impenitent.

Pardons and indulgences are the great support of papal power;—but these modern empirics in religion

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have improved upon the scheme, pretending to have discovered an infallible nostrum for all incurables; such as will preserve them for ever. —And notwithstanding we have instances of notorious offenders among the warmest advocates for sinless perfection,—the charm continues powerful. Did these visionary notions of an heated imagination tend only to amuse the fancy, they might be treated with contempt;—but when they depreciate all moral attainments;—when the suggestions of a frantic brain are blasphemously ascribed to the holy spirit of God;—when faith and divine love are placed in opposition to practical virtues, they then become the objects of aver-

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sion. In one sense, indeed, many of these deluded people demand our tenderest compassion,—whose disorder is in the head rather than the heart; and who call for the aid of a physician who can cure the distempered state of the body, rather than one who may sooth the anxieties of the mind.

Indeed, in many cases, they seem so much above the skill of either,—that unless God in his mercy rebuke this spirit of enthusiasm, which is gone out amongst us; no one can pretend to say how far it may go, or what mischiefs it may do in these kingdoms.—Already it has taught us as much blasphemous language;—and if it goes on, by the samples



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given us in their journals, will fill us with as many legendary accounts of visions and revelations, as we have formerly had from the church of Rome. And for any security we have against it,—when time shall serve, it may as effectually convert the professors of it, even into popery itself,—consistent with their own principles;—for they have nothing more to do than to say, that the spirit which inspired them, has signified, that the pope is inspired as well as they,—and consequently is infallible.—After which I cannot see how they can possibly refrain going to mass, consistent with their own principles.—

Thus much for these two opposite errors;—the examination of which

has taken up so much time,—that I have little left to add, but to beg of God, by the assistance of his holy spirit, to preserve us equally from both extremes, and enable us to form such right and worthy apprehensions of our holy religion,—that it may never suffer, through the coolness of our conceptions of it, on one hand,—or the immoderate heat of them, on the other ;—but that we may at all times see it, as it is, and as it was designed by its blessed Founder, as the most rational, sober, and consistent institution that could have been given to the sons of men.

Now to God, &c.

## SERMON XXIV.

Eternal Advantages of Religion.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 13.

*Let us bear the conclusion of the whole matter,—Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

THE wise man, in the beginning of this book, had proposed it as a grand query to be discussed,—*To find out what was good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heavens, all the days of their lives:—*That is, what was the fittest employment, and the chief and proper business, which they should apply them-

selves to in this world.—And here in the text, after a fair discussion of the question, he asserts it to be the business of religion,—the fearing God, and keeping his commandments.—This was the conclusion of the whole matter,—and the natural result of all his debates and inquiries.—And I am persuaded, the more observations we make upon the short life of man,—the more we experience,—and the longer trials we have of the world,—and the several pretensions it offers to our happiness,—the more we shall be engaged to think, like him,—that we can never find what we look for in any other thing which we do under the heavens, except in that of duty



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and obedience to GOD.—In the course of the wise man's examination of this point,—we find a great many beautiful reflections upon human affairs, all tending to illustrate the conclusion he draws ; and as they are such as are apt to offer themselves to the thoughts of every serious and considerate man, —I cannot do better than renew the impressions,—by retouching the principal arguments of his discourse,—before I proceed to the general use and application of the whole.

In the former part of his book he had taken into his consideration those several states of life to which men usually apply themselves for happiness ; —first, learning,—wisdom ; —next,—mirth, jollity, and pleasure ; —then

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power and greatness,—riches and possessions.—All of which are so far from answering the end for which they were at first pursued,—that, by a great variety of arguments,—he proves them severally to be so many *fore travels which God had given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith* :—and instead of being any, or all of them, our proper end and employment, or sufficient to our happiness,—he makes it plain, by a series of observations upon the life of man,—that they are ever likely to end with others where they had done with him;—that is, in vanity and vexation of spirit.

Then he takes notice of the several accidents of life, which perpetually rob us of what little sweets the

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fruition of these objects might seem to promise us,—both with regard to our endeavours and our persons in this world.

ist, With regard to our endeavours,—he shews that the most likely ways and means are not always effectual for the attaining of their end:—that, in general,—the utmost that human counsels and prudence can provide for, is to take care, when they contend in a race, that they be swifter than those who run against them;—or when they are to fight a battle, that they be stronger than those whom they are to encounter.—And yet afterwards, in the ninth chapter, he observes, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the

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strong;—neither yet bread to the wife,—nor yet riches to men of understanding—nor favour to men of skill;—but time and chance happen to them all.—That there are secret workings in human affairs, which over-rule all human contrivance, and counterplot the wisest of our counsels, in so strange and unexpected a manner, as to cast a damp upon our best schemes and warmest endeavours.

And then, for those accidents to which our persons are as liable as our labours,—he observes these three things;—first, the natural infirmities of bodies,—which alternately lay us open to the sad changes of pain and sickness; which, in the fifth chapter,



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he styles wrath and sorrow; under which, when a man lies languishing, none of his worldly enjoyments will signify much.—Like one that singeth songs with a heavy heart, neither mirth, —nor power, —nor riches, shall afford him ease, —nor will all their force be able so to stay the stroke of nature, —*but that he shall be cut off in the midst of his days, and then all his thoughts perish.* — Or else, —what is no uncommon spectacle, in the midst of all his luxury, he may waste away the greatest part of his life with much weariness and anguish; and with the long torture of an unrelenting disease, he may wish himself to go down into the grave, and to be set at liberty from

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all his possessions, and all his misery, at the same time.

2dly, If it be supposed,—that by the strength of spirits, and the natural cheerfulness of a man's temper, he should escape these, *and live many years and rejoice in them all*,—which is not the lot of many;—yet, *he must remember the days of darkness*;—that is,—they who devote themselves to a perpetual round of mirth and pleasure, cannot so manage matters as to avoid the thoughts of their *future states*, and the anxiety about what shall become of them hereafter, when they are to depart out of this world;—that they cannot so crowd their heads, and fill up their time with other

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matters,—but that the remembrance of this will sometimes be uppermost, —and thrust itself upon their minds whenever they are retired and serious. —And as this will naturally present to them a dark prospect of their future happiness,—it must, at the same time, prove no small damp and allay to what they would enjoy at present.

But, in the third place,—suppose a man should be able to avoid sickness, —and to put the trouble of *these thoughts* likewise far from him,—yet there is something else which he cannot possibly decline;—old age will unavoidably steal upon him, with all the infirmities of it,—when (as he expresses it) *the grinders shall be few, and appetite ceases; when those who*

*look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the keepers of the house shall tremble.*—When a man shall become a burden to himself, and to his friends; —when, perhaps, those of his nearest relations, whom he hath most obliged by kindness, shall think it time for him to depart, to creep off the stage, and make room for succeeding generations.

And then, after a little funeral pomp of *mourners going about the streets*,—a man shall be buried out of the way, and in a year or two be as much forgotten, as if he had never existed.—For there is no remembrance (says he) of the wise more than the fool;—seeing that which now is, in the days to come, shall



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be forgotten ; every day producing something which seems new and strange, to take up men's talk and wonder, and to drown the memory of former persons and actions.—

And I appeal to any rational man, whether these are not some of the most material reflections about human affairs,—which occur to every one who gives himself the least leisure to think about them?—Now, from all these premises put together, Solomon infers this short conclusion in the text,—That to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole of man ;—that, to be serious in the matter of religion, and careful about our future states, is that which, after

all our other experiments, will be found to be our chief happiness,—our greatest interest,—our greatest wisdom,—and that which most of all deserves our care and application.—This must ever be the last result, and the upshot of every wise man's observations upon all these transitory things, and upon the vanity of their several pretences to our well-being;—and we may depend upon it, as an everlasting truth,—that we can never find what we seek for in any other course, or any other object,—but this one;—and the more we know and think, and the more experience we have of the world, and of ourselves, the more we are convinced of this truth, and led back by it

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to rest our souls upon that God from whence we came.—Every consideration upon the life of man tends to engage us to this point,—to be in earnest in the concernment of religion;—to love and fear God;—to provide for our true interest,—and do ourselves the most effectual service,—by devoting ourselves to him,—and always thinking of him,—as he is the true and final happiness of a reasonable and an immortal spirit.

And indeed one would think it next to impossible,—did not the commonness of the thing take off from the wonder,—that a man who thinks at all,—should let his whole life be a contradiction to such obvious reflections.

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The vanity and emptiness of worldly goods and enjoyments,—the shortness and uncertainty of life,—the unalterable event hanging over our heads,—*that in a few days, we must all of us go to that place from whence we shall not return*;—the certainty of this,—the uncertainty of the time when,—the immortality of the soul,—the doubtful and momentous issues of eternity,—the terrors of damnation, and the glorious things which are spoken of the city of God, are meditations so obvious, and so naturally check and block up a man's way,—are so very interesting, and, above all, so unavoidable,—that it is astonishing how it was possible, at any time, for mortal man to have his head



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full of any thing else?—And yet, was the same person to take a view of the state of the world,—how slight an observation would convince him, that the wonder lay in fact, on the other side; and that, as wisely as we all discourse, and philosophize *de contemptu mundi* & *fugâ sæculi*—yet, for one who really acts in the world—consistent with his own reflections upon it,—that there are multitudes who seem to take aim at nothing higher;—and as empty a thing as it is,—are so dazzled with, as to think it meet to build tabernacles of rest upon it,—and say, *It is good to be here.*—Whether, as an able inquirer into this paradox guesses,—whether it is, that men do not heartily believe such a

thing as a future state of happiness and misery,—or if they do,—that they do not actually and seriously consider it,—but suffer it to lay dormant and unactive within them, and so are as little affected with it, as if, in truth, they believed it not;—or whether they look upon it through that end of the perspective which represents as afar off,—and so are more forcibly drawn by the nearer, though the lesser, loadstone: whether these, or whatever other cause may be assigned for it,—the observation is incontestible, that the bulk of mankind, in passing through this vale of misery,—use it *not as a well* to refresh and allay,—but fully to quench and satisfy their thirst;—minding (or as the Apostle says),

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relishing earthly things,—making them the end and sum total of their desires and wishes,—and, in one word,—loving this world—just as they are commanded to love God;—that is,—*with all their heart, with all their soul*,—with all their mind and strength.—But this is not the strangest part of this paradox—A man shall not only lean and rest upon the world with his whole stress,—but, in many instances, shall live notoriously bad and vicious;—when he is re-proved, he shall seem convinced;—when he is observed,—he shall be ashamed;—when he pursues his sin,—he will do it in the dark;—and when he has done it, shall even be dissatisfied with himself:—yet still,

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this shall produce no alteration in his conduct.—Tell him he shall one day die;—or bring 'the event still nearer,—and shew, that, according to the course of nature, he cannot possibly live many years,—he will sigh, perhaps,—and tell you he is convinced of that, as much as reason and experience can make him:—proceed and urge to him,—that after death comes judgment, and that he will certainly there be dealt with by a just God according to his actions;—he will thank God he is no deist,—and tell you, with the same grave face,—he is thoroughly convinced of that too;—and as he believes,—no doubt he trembles too;—and yet after all, with all this conviction



SERMON XXIV. 51

upon his mind, you will see him still persevere in the same course,—and commit his sin with as certain an event and resolution, as if he knew no argument against it.—These notices of things, however terrible and true, pass through his understanding as an eagle through the air, that leaves no path behind.

So that, upon the whole, instead of abounding with occasions to set us seriously on thinking,—the world might dispense with many more calls of this kind;—and were they seven times as many as they are,—considering what insufficient use we make of those we have, all, I fear, would be little enough to bring these things to our remembrance as often, and en-

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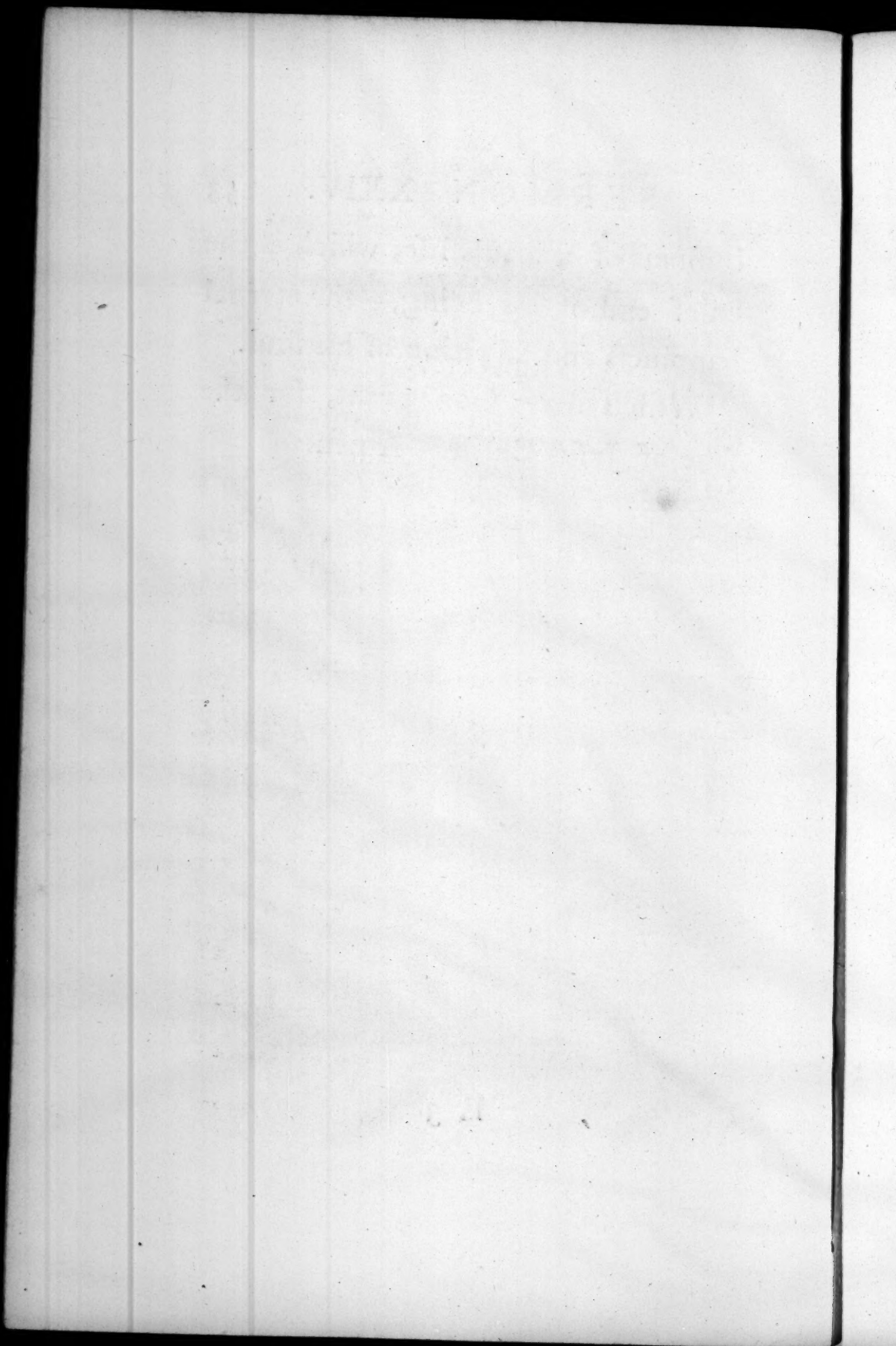
gage us to lay them to our hearts with that affectionate concern, which the weight and interest of them require at our hands.—Sooner or later, the most inconsiderate of us all shall find, with Solomon,—that to do this effectually, is the whole of man.

And I cannot conclude this discourse upon his words better than with a short and earnest exhortation, that the solemnity of this season,—and the meditations to which it is devoted, may lead you up to the true knowledge and practice of the same point, of fearing God and keeping his commandments,—and convince you, as it did him, of the indispensable necessity of making that the

SERMON XXIV. 53

business of a man's life, which is the chief end of his being,—the eternal happiness and salvation of his soul.

Which may God grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.





## SERMON XXV.

Aſa: a Thankſgiving Sermon.

2 CHRONICLES, XV. 14.

*And they ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhoutiug, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.*

**I**T will be neceſſary to give a particular account of what was the occaſion, as well as the nature, of the oath which the men of Judah ſware unto the Lord;—which will explain not only the reaſons why it became a matter of ſo much joy to them, but likewiſe admit of an ap-

56      SERMON XXV.

plication fuitable to the purposes of this solemn assembly.

Abijah, and Afa his fon, were fucceffive kings of Judah.—The first came to the crown at the close of a long, and, in the end, a very unsuccessful war, which had gradually wasted the strength and riches of his kingdom.

He was a prince endowed with the talents which the emergencies of his country required, and seemed born to make Judah a victorious, as well as a happy people.—The conduct and great success of his arms against Jero-boam, had well established the first;—but his kingdom, which had been so many years the seat of a war, had been

SERMON XXV. 57

so wasted and bewildered, that his reign, good as it was, was too short to accomplish the latter.—He died, and left the work unfinished for his son.—Aśa succeeded, in the room of Abijah his father, with the truest notions of religion and government that could be fetched either from reason or experience.—His reason told him, that God should be worshipped in simplicity and singleness of heart;—therefore he took away the altars of the strange gods, and broke down their images.—His experience told him, that the most successful wars, instead of invigorating, more generally drained away the vitals of government,—and, at the best, ended but in a brighter and more ostenta-

## 58      SERMON XXV.

tious kind of poverty and desolation :  
—therefore he laid aside his sword,  
and studied the arts of ruling Judah  
with peace.—Conscience would not  
suffer Aſa to ſacrifice his ſubjects  
to private views of ambition, and  
wiſdom forbade he ſhould ſuffer them  
to offer up themſelves to the pre-  
ſence of public ones;—ſince enlarge-  
ment of empire, by the deſtruction  
of its people (the natural and only  
valuable ſource of ſtrength and  
riches), was a diſhoneſt and miſerable  
exchange.—And however well the  
glory of a conqueſt might appear in  
the eyes of a common beholder, yet,  
when bought at that coſtly rate, a  
father to his country would behold  
the triumphs which attended it, and



SERMON XXV. 59

weep as it passed by him.—Amidst all the glare and jollity of the day, the parents eyes would fix attentively upon his child;—he would discern him drooping under the weight of his attire, without strength or vigour, —his former beauty and comeliness gone off:—he would behold the coat of many colours stained with blood, and cry,—Alas! they have decked thee with a parent's pride, but not with a parent's care and foresight.

With such affectionate sentiments of government, and just principles of religion, Aſa began his reign.—A reign marked out with new æras, and a ſucceſſion of happier occur-

60      S E R M O N    X X V .

rences than what had distinguished former days.

The just and gentle spirit of the prince, insensibly stole into the breasts of the people.—The men of Judah turned their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.—By industry and virtuous labour they acquired, what by spoil and rapine they might have sought after long in vain.—The traces of their late troubles soon began to wear out.—The cities, which had become ruinous and desolate (the prey of famine and the sword), were now rebuilt, fortified, and made populous.—Peace, security, wealth, and prosperity, seemed to compose the whole

SERMON XXV. 61

history of Afa's reign.—O Judah !  
what could then have been done more  
than what was done to make thy people  
happy?—

What one blessing was withheld,  
that thou shouldst ever withhold thy  
thankfulness?—

That thou didst not continually turn  
thy eyes towards heaven with an habitual  
sense of God's mercies, and devoutly  
praise him for setting Afa over  
you.

Were not the public blessings, and  
the private enjoyments, which every  
man of Judah derived from them,  
such as to make the continuance of  
them desirable?—and what other way  
was there to effect it, than to swear  
unto the Lord, with all your hearts

and souls, to perform the covenant made with your fathers?—to secure that favour and interest with the Almighty Being, without which the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and the best connected systems of human policy are speculative and airy projects, without foundation or substance.

—The history of their own exploits and establishment since they had become a nation, was a strong confirmation of this doctrine.

But too free and uninterrupted a possession of God Almighty's blessings, sometimes (though it seems strange to suppose it) even tempts men to forget him, either from a certain depravity and ingratitude of nature, not to be wrought upon by good-



SERMON XXV. 63

ness,—or that they are made by it too passionately fond of the present hour, and too thoughtless of its great Author, whose kind providence brought it about.—This seemed to have been the case with the men of Judah:—for notwithstanding all that God had done for them, in placing Abijah, and Aza his son, over them, and inspiring them with hearts and talents proper to retrieve the errors of the foregoing reign, and bring back peace and plenty to the dwellings of Judah;—yet there appears no record of any solemn and religious acknowledgment to God for such signal favours.—The people sat down in a thankless security, each man under his vine, to eat and drink, and rose up to play;—

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more solicitous to enjoy their blessings, than to deserve them.

But this scene of tranquillity was not to subsist without some change ; —and it seemed as if providence at length had suffered the stream to be interrupted, to make them consider whence it flowed, and how necessary it had been all along to their support. —The Ethiopians, ever since the beginning of Abijah's, reign, until the tenth year of Aza's, had been at peace, or at least, whatever secret enmity they bore, had made no open attacks upon the kingdom of Judah.—And indeed the bad measures which Rehoboam had taken, in the latter part of the reign which immediately preceded theirs, seemed to have saved the Ethi-

SERMON XXV. 69

opians the trouble.—For Rehoboam, though in the former part of his reign he dealt wisely; yet when he had established his kingdom, and strengthened himself,—he forsook the laws of the Lord;—he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men, which were brought up with him, and stood before him.—Such ill-advised measures, in all probability, had given the enemies of Judah such decisive advantages over her, that they had sat down contented, and for many years enjoyed the fruit of their acquisitions.—But the friendship of princes is seldom made up of better materials than those which are every day to be seen in private life,—in

66      SERMON XXV.

which sincerity and affection are not at all considered as ingredients.—Change of time and circumstances produce a change of counsels and behaviour.—Judah, in length of time, had become a fresh temptation, and was worth fighting for.—Her riches and plenty might first make her enemies covet, and then the remembrance of how cheap and easy a prey she had formerly been, might make them not doubt of obtaining.

By these apparent motives (or whether God, who sometimes over-rules the heart of man, was pleased to turn them by secret ones, to the purposes of his wisdom) the ambition of the Ethiopians revived, with an host of men numerous as the sand upon the



SERMON XXV. 67

sea-shore in multitude.—They had left their country, and were coming forwards to invade them.—What can Judah propose to do in so terrifying a crisis?—where can she betake herself for refuge?—on one hand, her religion and laws are too precious to be given up, or trusted to the hands of a stranger;—and on the other hand, how can so small a kingdom, just recovering strength, surrounded by an army of a thousand thousand men, besides chariots and horses, be able to withstand so powerful a shock?—But here it appeared that those, who, in their prosperity, can forget God, do yet remember him in the day of danger and distress;—and can begin with comfort to depend upon his provi-

68 SERMON XXV.

dence, when with comfort they can depend upon nothing else.—For when Zerah, the Ethiopian, was come unto the valley of Zephatha at Maretha, Afa, and all the men of Judah, and Benjamin, went out against him;—and as they went, they cried mightily unto God.—And Afa prayed for his people, and he said,—“ O Lord! it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power:—help us, O Lord our God; for we rest in thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.—O Lord, thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee.”—Success almost seemed a debt due to the piety of the prince, and the contrition of his

SERMON XXV. 69

people.—So God smote the Ethiopians, and they could not recover themselves :—for they were scattered and utterly destroyed,—before the Lord, and before his host.—And as they returned to Jerusalem from pursuing,—behold the spirit of God came upon Afariah, the son of Oded.—And he went out to meet Afa, and he said unto him,—Hear ye me, Afa, and all Judah and Benjamin ;—the Lord is with you, whilst you are with him ;—and if you seek him, he will be found of you, but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.—Nothing could more powerfully call home the conscience than so timely an exhortation.—The men of Judah and Benjamin, struck with a sense

of their late deliverance, and the many other felicities they had enjoyed since Afa was king over them, they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem, in the third month in the fifteenth year of Afa's reign;—and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul:—and they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath.

One may observe a kind of luxury in the description, which the holy historian gives of the transport of the men of Judah upon this occasion.—And sure, if ever matter of



SERMON XXV. 71

joy was so reasonably founded, as to excuse any excesses in the expressions of it,—this was one:—for without it,—the condition of Judah, though otherwise the happiest, would have been, of all nations under heaven, the most miserable.

Let us suppose a moment, instead of being repulsed, that the enterprize of the Ethiopians had prospered against them:—like other grievous distempers, where the vitals are first attacked,—Afa, their king, would have been fought after, and have been made the first sacrifice.—He must either have fallen by the sword of battle, or execution; or, what is worse, he must have survived the ruin of his country by flight,—and

worn out the remainder of his days in sorrow, for the afflictions which were come upon it.—In some remote corner of the world, the good king would have heard the particulars of Judah's destruction.—He would have been told how the country, which had become dear to him by his paternal care, was now utterly laid waste, and all his labour lost;—how the fences which protected it were torn up, and the tender plant within, which he had so long sheltered, was cruelly trodden under foot and devoured.—He would hear how Zerah, the Ethiopian, when he had overthrown the kingdom, thought himself bound in conscience to overthrow the religion of it too, and

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establish his own idolatrous one in its stead.—That, in pursuance of this, the holy religion, which Aſa had reformed, had begun every where to be evil ſpoken of, and evil entreated :

That it was firſt baniſhed from the courts of the king's houſe, and the miſt of Jeruſalem,—and then fled for ſafety out of the way into the wilderneſs, and found no city to dwell in.—That Zerah had rebuilt the altars of the ſtrange gods,—which Aſa's piety had broken down, and ſet up their images :

That his commandment was *urgent*, that all ſhould fall down and worſhip the idol he had made:—That, to complete the tale of their miſeries, there was no proſpect of deliverance

for any but the worst of his subjects;—those who, in his reign, had either leaned in their hearts towards these idolatries,—or whose principles and morals were such, that all religions suited them alike.—But that the honest and conscientious men of Judah, unable to behold such abominations, hung down every man his head like a bulrush, and put sack-cloth and ashes under him.

This picture of Judah's desolation might be some resemblance of what every of Aha's subjects would probably form to himself, the day he solemnised an exemption from it.—And the transport was natural,—To swear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets,



SERMON XXV. 75

and with cornets;—to rejoice at the oath which secured their future peace, and celebrate it with all external marks of gladness.

I have at length gone through the story, which gave the occasion to this religious act, which is recorded of the men of Judah in the text.

I believe there is not one, in sacred Scripture, that bids fairer for a parallel to our own times, or that would admit of an application more suitable to the solemnity of this day.

But men are apt to be struck with likenesses in so different a manner, from the different points of view in which they stand, as well as their diversity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officious-

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ness to fix any certain degrees of approach.

In this case, it seems sufficient,—that those who will discern the least resemblance, will discern enough to make them seriously comply with the devotion of the day;—and that those who are affected with it in a stronger manner, and see the blessing of a protestant king in its fairest light, with all the mercies which made way for it, will have still more abundant reason to adore that good Being, which has all along protected it from the enemies which have risen up to do it violence;—but more especially, in a late instance, by turning down the counsels of the froward headlong,—and confounding the devices of the crafty,—

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SERMON XXV. 77

so that their hands could not perform their enterprize.—Though this event, for many reasons, will ever be told amongst the felicities of these days ; —yet for none more so, than that it has given us a fresh mark of the continuation of God Almighty's favour to us :—a part of that great complicated blessing for which we are gathered together to return him thanks.

Let us, therefore, I beseech you, endeavour to do it in the way which becomes wise men, and which is likely to be most acceptable ;—and that is,——to pursue the intentions of his providence, in giving us the occasion——to become better men, and by a holy and an honest conversation, make ourselves capable of enjoying

what God has done for us.—In vain shall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets,—if we do not do it likewise with the internal and more certain marks of sincerity,—a reformation and purity in our manners.—It is impossible a sinful people can either be grateful to God, or properly loyal to their prince.—They cannot be grateful to the one, because they live not under a sense of his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, because they daily offend in two of the tenderest points which concern his welfare.—By first disengaging the providence of God, from taking our part, and then giving a heart to our adversaries to lift their hands against us,



SERMON XXV. 79

who must know, that, if we forsake God, God will forsake us.—Their hopes, their designs, their wickedness against us, can only be built upon ours towards God.

For if they did not think we did evil, they durst not hope we could perish.

Cease therefore, to do evil;—for by following righteousness, you will make the hearts of your enemies faint, they will turn their backs against your indignation,—and their weapons will fall from their hands.

Which may God grant, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour, &c. Amen.

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## SERMON XXVI.

Follow Peace.

HEBREWS, xii. 14.

*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

THE great end and design of our holy religion, next to the main view of reconciling us to God, was to reconcile us to each other;—by teaching us to subdue all those unfriendly dispositions in our nature, which unfit us for happiness, and the social enjoyment of the many blessings which God has enabled us to

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partake of in this world, miserable as it is, in many respects.—Could Christianity persuade the professors of it into this temper, and engage us, as its doctrine requires, to go on and exalt our natures, and, after the subduction of the most unfriendly of our passions, to plant, in the room of them, all those (more natural to the soil) humane and benevolent inclinations, which, in imitation of the perfections of God, should dispose us to extend our love and goodness to our fellow-creatures, according to the extent of our abilities;—in like manner, as the goodness of God extends itself over all the works of the creation:—could this be accomplished,—the world would be worth



SERMON XXVI. 83

living in; and might be considered by us as a foretaste of what we should enter upon hereafter.

But such a system, you'll say, is merely visionary;—and, considering man as a creature so beset with selfishness, and other fretful passions that propensity prompts him to, though it is to be wished, it is not to be expected.—But our religion enjoins us to approach as near this fair pattern as we can; and, if it be possible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men;—where the term,—If possible, I own, implies it may not only be difficult, but sometimes impossible.—Thus the words of the text,—Follow peace,—may by some be thought to imply,—

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that this desirable blessing may sometimes fly from us:—but still we are required to follow it, and not cease the pursuit, till we have used all warrantable methods to regain and settle it:—because, adds the Apostle, without this frame of mind, no man shall see the Lord. For heaven is the region, as well as the recompence, of peace and benevolence; and such as do not desire and promote it here, are not qualified to enjoy it hereafter.

For this cause, in Scripture language,—peace is always spoke of as the great and comprehensive blessing, which included in it all manner of happiness;—and to wish peace to any house or person, was, in one

## SERMON XXVI. 85

word, to wish them all that was good and desirable.—Because happiness consists in the inward complacency and satisfaction of the mind; and he who has such a disposition of soul, as to acquiesce and rest contented with all the events of providence, can want nothing this world can give him.—Agreeable to this,—that short, but most comprehensive, hymn sung by angels at our Saviour's birth, declaratory of the joy and happy ends of his incarnation,—after glory, in the first, to God,—the next note which sounded was, Peace upon earth, and good-will to men!—It was a public wish of happiness to mankind, and implied a solemn charge to pursue the means that would ever

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lead to it.—And, in truth, the good tidings of the gospel are nothing else but a grand message and embassy of peace, to let us know, that our peace is made in heaven.

The prophet Isaiah styles our Saviour the Prince of Peace, long before he came into the world;—and to answer the title, he made choice to enter into it at a time when all nations were at peace with each other; which was in the days of Augustus,—when the temple of Janus was shut, and all the alarms of war were hushed and silenced throughout the world.—At his birth, the host of heaven descended, and proclaimed peace on earth, as the best state and temper the world could



## SERMON XXVI. 87

be in to receive and welcome the Author of it.—His future conversation and doctrine, here upon earth, was every way agreeable with his peaceable entrance upon it;—the whole course of his life being but one great example of meekness, peace and patience.—At his death, it was the only legacy he bequeathed to his followers:—My peace I give unto you.—How far this has taken place, or been actually enjoyed,—is not my intention to enlarge upon, any further than just to observe how precious a bequest it was, from the many miseries and calamities which have, and ever will, ensue from the want of it.—If we look into the larger circle of the world,—what

## 88 SERMON XXVI.

defolations, diffolutions of government, and invasions of property!—what rapine, plunder, and profanation of the most sacred rights of mankind, are the certain unhappy effects of it!—fields dyed in blood,—the cries of orphans and widows, bereft of their best help, too fully instruct us.—Look into private life,—behold how good and pleasant a thing it is to live together in unity;—it is like the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that run down to his skirts;—importing, that this balm of life is felt and enjoyed, not only by governors of kingdoms, but is derived down to the lowest rank of life, and tasted in the most private recesses;—all, from the king

SERMON XXVI. 89

to the peasant, are refreshed with its blessings, without which we can find no comfort in any thing this world can give.—It is this blessing gives every one to sit quietly under his vine, and reap the fruits of his labour and industry :—in one word,—which bespeaks who is the bestower of it—it is that only which keeps up the harmony and order of the world, and preserves every thing in it from ruin and confusion.

There is one saying of our Saviour's, recorded by St. Matthew, which, at first sight, seems to carry some opposition to this doctrine;—I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.—But this reaches no farther than the bare words, not entering so

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deep as to affect the sense, or imply any contradiction ;—intimating only, —that the preaching of the gospel will prove in the event, through sundry unhappy causes, such as prejudices, the corruption of men's hearts, a passion for idolatry and superstition, the occasion of much variance and division even amongst nearest relations ;—yea, and oft-times of bodily death, and many calamities and persecutions, which actually ensued upon the first preachers and followers of it.—Or the words may be understood,—as a beautiful description of the inward contests and opposition which Christianity would occasion in the heart of man,—from its oppositions to the violent passions



## SERMON XXVI. 91

of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare.—This was not only a sword,—a division betwixt nearest kindred ;—but it was dividing a man against himself,—setting up an opposition to an interest long established,—strong by nature,—more so by uncontrouled custom.—This is verified every hour in the struggles for mastery betwixt the principles of the world, the flesh and the devil ;—which set up so strong a confederacy, that there is need of all the helps which reason and Christianity can offer to bring them down.

But this contention is not that against which such exhortations in the gospel are levelled ;—for the Scrip-

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ture must be interpreted by Scripture, and be made consistent with itself.—And we find the distinguishing marks and doctrines, by which all men were to know who were Christ's disciples,—was that benevolent frame of mind towards all our fellow-creatures, which, by itself, is a sufficient security for the particular social duty here recommended :—so far from meditations of war ;—for love thinketh no evil to his neighbour ;—so far from doing any, it harbours not the least thought of it ; but, on the contrary, rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.

This debt Christianity, has highly exalted ; though it is a debt that we

SERMON XXVI. 93

were sensible of before, and acknowledged to be owed to human nature,—which, as we all partake of,—so ought we to pay it in a suitable respect.—For, as men, we are allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood, and are members one of another.—We have the same Father in heaven, who made us and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too is nearer alike, than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of:—for Adam was the father of us all, and Eve the mother of all living.—The prince and the beggar sprung from the same stocks, as wide asunder as the branches are.—So that, in this view, the most upstart family may vie antiquity, and compare families

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with the greatest monarchs.—We are all formed too of the same mould, and must equally return to the same dust.—So that, to love our neighbour, and live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourselves.—He is but self-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon observes of the unmerciful, to be cruel to our own flesh.—As a farther motive and engagement to this peaceable commerce with each other, —God has placed us all in one another's power by turns,—in a condition of mutual need and dependence. —There is no man so liberally stocked with earthly blessings, as to be able to live without another man's



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aid.—God, in his wisdom, has so dispensed his gifts, in various kinds and measures, as to render us helpful, and make a social intercourse indispensable.—The prince depends on the labour and industry of the peasant;—and the wealth and honour of the greatest persons are fed and supported from the same source.

This the Apostle hath elegantly set forth to us by the familiar resemblance of the natural body;—wherein there are many members, and all have not the same office; but the different faculties and operations of each, are for the use and benefit of the whole.—The eye sees not for itself, but for the other members;—and is set up as a light to direct

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them:—the feet serve to support and carry about the other parts; and the hands act and labour for them all. It is the same in states and kingdoms, wherein there are many members, yet each in their several functions and employments; which, if peaceably discharged, are for the harmony of the whole state.—Some are eyes and guides to the blind;—others, feet to the lame and impotent;—some to supply the place of the head, to assist with counsel and direction;—others the hand, to be useful by their labour and industry.—To make this link of dependence still stronger,—there is a great portion of mutability in all human affairs, to make benignity of temper

SERMON XXVI. 97

not only our duty, but our interest and wisdom.—There is no condition in life so fixed and permanent as to be out of danger, or the reach of change :—and we all may depend upon it, that we shall take our turns of wanting and desiring.—By how many unforeseen causes may riches take wing !—The crowns of princes may be shaken, and the greatest that ever awed the world have experienced what the turn of the wheel can do.—That which hath happened to one man, may befall another ; and, therefore, that excellent rule of our Saviour's ought to govern us in all our actions,—Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you also to

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them likewise.—Time and chance happens to all;—and the most affluent may be stript of all, and find his worldly comforts like so many withered leaves dropping from him.—Sure nothing can better become us, than hearts so full of our dependance as to overflow with mercy, and pity, and good-will towards mankind.—To exhort us to this, is, in other words, to exhort us to follow peace with all men:—the first is the root, —this the fair fruit and happy product of it.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, in the bowels of mercy, let us put away anger, and malice, and evil speaking;—let us fly all clamour and



SERMON XXVI. 99

strife;—let us be kindly affected one to another,—following peace with all men, and holiness, that we may see the Lord.

Which GOD of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

It is not to be denied that the  
following are the main points  
which all men, and nations, have  
been led to see.  
Which, too, of his nature, they  
are then to be made of his  
and his and his. And

## SERMON XXVII.

Search the Scriptures.

ST. JOHN, v. 39.

*Search the Scriptures.*

**T**HAT things of the most inestimable use and value, for want of due application and study laid out upon them, may be passed by unregarded, nay, even looked upon with coldness and aversion, is a truth too evident to need enlarging on.—Nor is it less certain that prejudices, contracted by an unhappy education, will sometimes so stop up all the passages to our hearts, that the most

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amiable objects can never find access, or bribe us by all their charms into justice and impartiality.—It would be passing the tenderest reflection upon the age we live in, to say it is owing to one of these, that those inestimable books, the Sacred Writings, meet so often with a disrelish (what makes the accusation almost incredible) amongst persons who set up for men of taste and delicacy; who pretend to be charmed with what they call beauties and nature in classical authors, and in other things would blush not to be reckoned amongst sound and impartial critics.—But so far has negligence and prepossession stopped their ears against the voice of the charmer, that they turn over



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those awful sacred pages with inattention and an unbecoming indifference, unaffected amidst ten thousand sublime and noble passages, which, by the rules of sound criticism and reason, may be demonstrated to be truly eloquent and beautiful.

Indeed the opinion of false Greek and barbarous language, in the Old and New Testament, had, for some ages, been a stumbling-block to another set of men, who were professedly great readers and admirers of the ancients.—The Sacred Writings were, by these persons, rudely attacked on all sides : expressions which came not within the compass of their learning, were branded with barbarism and solecism ; words which scarce signified

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any thing but the ignorance of those who laid such groundless charges on them.—Presumptuous man!—Shall he, who is but dust and ashes, dare to find fault with the words of that Being, who first inspired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter; who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the infant eloquent? —These persons, as they attacked the inspired writings on the foot of critics and men of learning, accordingly have been treated as such: and tho' a shorter way might have been gone to work, which was,—that as their accusations reached no farther than the bare words and phraseology of the Bible, they, in no wise, affected the sentiments and soundness of the

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doctrines, which were conveyed with as much clearness and perspicuity to mankind, as they could have been, had the language been written with the utmost elegance and grammatical nicety. And even though the charge of barbarous idioms could be made out;—yet the cause of christianity was thereby no ways affected, but remained just in the state they found it.—Yet, unhappily for them, they even miscarried in their favourite point;—there being few, if any at all, of the Scripture expressions, which may not be justified by numbers of parallel modes of speaking, made use of amongst the purest and most authentic Greek authors.—This, an able hand amongst us, not many years

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ago, has sufficiently made out, and thereby baffled and exposed all their presumptuous and ridiculous assertions.—These persons, bad and deceitful as they were, are yet far out-gone by a third set of men,—I wish we had not too many instances of them, who, like foul stomachs, that turn the sweetest food to bitterness, upon all occasions endeavour to make merry with sacred Scripture, and turn every thing they meet with therein into banter and burlesque.—But as men of this stamp, by their excess of wickedness and weakness together, have entirely disarmed us from arguing with them as reasonable creatures, it is not only making them too considerable, but likewise



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to no purpose to spend much time about them; they being, in the language of the Apostle, creatures of no understanding, speaking evil of things they know not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.—Of these two last, the one is disqualified for being argued with, and the other has no occasion for it; they being already silenced.—Yet those that were first mentioned, may not altogether be thought unworthy of our endeavours;—being persons, as was hinted above, who, though their tastes are so far vitiated that they cannot relish the Sacred Scriptures, yet have imaginations capable of being raised by the fancied excellencies of classical writers.—And in-

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deed these persons claim from us some degree of pity, when, through the unskilfulness of preceptors in their youth, or some other unhappy circumstance in their education, they have been taught to form false and wretched notions of good writing.—When this is the case it is no wonder they should be more touched and affected with the dressed up trifles and empty conceits of poets, and rhetoricians, than they are with that true sublimity and grandeur of sentiment which glow throughout every page of the inspired writings.—By way of information, such should be instructed:—

There are two sorts of eloquence, the one indeed scarce deserves the name of it, which consists chiefly in laboured

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and polished periods, an over-curious and artificial arrangement of figures, tinsel'd over with a gaudy embellishment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the understanding. This kind of writing is for the most part much affected and admired by people of weak judgment and vicious taste, but is a piece of affectation and formality the sacred writers are utter strangers to.—It is a vain and boyish eloquence; and as it has always been esteemed below the great geniuses of all ages, so much more so, with respect to those writers who were actuated by the spirit of infinite wisdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majesty with which never man writ.—The other

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fort of eloquence is quite the reverse to this, and which may be said to be the true characteristic of the holy Scriptures: where the excellence does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty, which is a double character, so difficult to be united, that it is seldom to be met with in compositions merely human.—We see nothing in holy writ of affectation and superfluous ornament.—As the infinite wise Being has condescended to stoop to our language, thereby to convey to us the light of revelation, so has he been pleased graciously to accommodate it to us with the most natural and graceful plainness it



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would admit of.—Now, it is observable that the most excellent prophane authors, whether Greek or Latin, lose most of their graces whenever we find them literally translated.—Homer's famed representation of Jupiter, in his first book;—his cried-up description of a tempest;—his relation of Neptune's shaking the earth, and opening it to its center;—his description of Pallas's horses; with numbers of other long-since-admired passages,—flag, and almost vanish away, in the vulgar Latin translation.

Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpretation of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar, and one may venture to

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affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him so much in the original.—The natural conclusion from hence is, that in the classical authors, the expression, the sweetness of the numbers, occasioned by a musical placing of words, constitute a great part of their beauties;—whereas, in the Sacred Writings, they consist more in the greatness of the things themselves, than in the words and expressions.—The ideas and conceptions are so great and lofty in their own nature, that they necessarily appear magnificent in the most artless drefs.—Look but into the Bible, and we see them shine through the most simple and literal translations.—That

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glorious description which Moses gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which Longinus, the best critic the eastern world ever produced, was so justly taken with, has not lost the least whit of its intrinsic worth ; and though it has undergone so many translations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original.—Of this stamp are numbers of passages throughout the Scriptures ;—instance, that celebrated description of a tempest in the hundred and seventh psalm ; those beautiful reflections of holy Job, upon the shortness of life, and instability of human affairs, so judiciously appointed by our church in her

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office for the burial of the dead;— that lively description of a horse of war, in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, in which, from the 19th to the 26th verse, there is scarce a word which does not merit a particular explication to display the beauties of.—I might add to these, those tender and pathetic expostulations with the children of Israel, which run throughout all the prophets, which the most uncritical reader can scarce help being affected with.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.—What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done?—wherefore, when I expected



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that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?—and yet, ye say, the way of the Lord is unequal.—Hear now, O house of Israel,—Is not my way equal?—are not your ways unequal?—have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, and not that he should return from his ways and live?—I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.—The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib;—but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.—There is nothing in all the eloquence of the heathen world comparable to the vivacity and tenderness of these reproaches;—there is something in them so thoroughly

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affecting, and so noble and sublime withal, that one might challenge the writings of the most celebrated orators of antiquity to produce any thing like them.—These observations upon the superiority of the inspired penmen to heathen ones, in that which regards the composition, more conspicuously hold good when they are considered upon the foot of historians.—Not to mention that profane histories give an account only of human achievements and temporal events, which, for the most part, are so full of uncertainty and contradictions, that we are at a loss where to seek for truth;—but that the sacred history is the history of God himself,—the history of his

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omnipotence and infinite wisdom, his universal providence, his justice and mercy, and all his other attributes, displayed under a thousand different forms, by a series of the most various and wonderful events that ever happened to any nation, or language:—not to insist upon this visible superiority in sacred history,—there is yet another undoubted excellence the prophane historians seldom arrive at, which is almost the distinguishing character of the sacred ones; namely, that unaffected, artless manner of relating historical facts,—which is so intirely of a piece with every other part of the holy writings.—What I mean will be best made out by a few instances.—In the history of Joseph,

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(which certainly is told with the greatest variety of beautiful and affecting circumstances) when Joseph makes himself known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the house of Pharaoh heard him;—at that instant, none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to express their present joy, or palliate their former injuries to him.—On all sides, there immediately ensues a deep and solemn silence;—a silence infinitely more eloquent and expressive, than any thing else could have been substituted in its place.—Had Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated classical historians, been employed in writing this history,



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when they came to this point, they would, doubtless, have exhausted all their fund of eloquence in furnishing Joseph's brethren with laboured and studied harangues; which, however fine they might have been in themselves, would nevertheless have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occasion.—For when such a variety of contrary passions broke in upon them,—what tongue was able to utter their hurried and distracted thoughts?—When remorse, surprise, shame, joy and gratitude struggled together in their bosoms, how uneloquently would their lips have performed their duty?—how unfaithfully their tongues have spoken the language of their hearts?—In this

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case, silence was truly eloquent and natural, and tears expressed what oratory was incapable of.

If ever these persons I have been addressing myself to, can be persuaded to follow the advice in the text, of searching the Scriptures,—the work of their salvation will be begun upon its true foundation.—For, first, they will insensibly be led to admire the beautiful propriety of their language:—when a favourable opinion is conceived of this, next, they will more closely attend to the goodness of the moral, and the purity and soundness of the doctrines.—The pleasure of reading will still be increased, by that near concern which they will find themselves to have in those many im-

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portant truths, which they will see so clearly demonstrated in the Bible, that grand charter of our eternal happiness.—It is the fate of mankind, too often, to seem insensible of what they may enjoy at the easiest rate.—What might not our neighbouring Romish countries, who groan under the yoke of popish impositions and priest-craft, what might not those poor, misguided creatures give, for the happiness which we know not how to value,—of being born in a country where a church is established by our laws, and encouraged by our princes; which not only allows the free study of the Scriptures, but even exhorts and invites us to it:—a church that is a stranger to the tricks and artifice of having the Bible in an un-

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known tongue, to give the greater latitude to the designs of the clergy in imposing their own trumpery, and foisting in whatever may best serve to aggrandize themselves, or enslave the wretches committed to their trust.—In short, our religion was not given us to raise our imaginations with ornaments of words, or strokes of eloquence; but to purify our hearts, and lead us into the paths of righteousness.—However, not to defend ourselves,—when the attack is principally level'd at this point,—might give occasion to our adversaries to triumph, and charge us either with negligence or inability.—It is well known how willing the enemies of our religion are to seek occasions against us;—how ready to magnify



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every mote in our eyes to the bigness of a beam;—how eager, upon the least default, to insult and cry out,—There, there! so would we have it:—not, perhaps, that we are so much the subject of malice and aversion, but that the licentious age seems bent upon bringing christianity into discredit at any rate; and, rather than miss the aim, would strike through the sides of those that are sent to teach it.—Thank God, the truth of our holy religion is established with such strong evidence, that it rests upon a foundation never to be overthrown, either by the open assaults or cunning devices of wicked and designing men.—The part we have to act is to be steady, sober, and vigilant; to be ready to every good work; to

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reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering; to give occasion of offence to no man; that, with well-doing, we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

I shall close all with that excellent collect of our church:—

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be witten for our learning,—grant that we may in such-wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Now to God the Father, &c.

## SERMON XXVIII.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

*O come let us worship and fall down  
before him :—for he is the Lord our  
God.——*

**I**N this psalm we find holy David taken up with the pious contemplation of God's infinite power, majesty, and greatness :—he considers him as the sovereign Lord of the whole earth, the maker and supporter of all things ;—that by him the heavens were created, and all the host of them ;—that the earth was wisely fashioned by his hands ;—he had founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods :—that

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we likewise, the people of his pasture, were raised up by the same creating hand, from nothing, to the dignity of rational creatures, made, with respect to our reason and understanding, after his own most perfect image.

It was natural to imagine that such a contemplation would light up a flame of devotion in any grateful man's breast; and accordingly we find it break forth in the words of the text, in a kind of religious rapture :—

O come let us worship and fall down before him :—for he is the Lord our God.

Sure never exhortation to prayer and worship can be better enforced than upon this principle,—that God



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is the cause and creator of all things;—that each individual being is upheld in the station it was first placed, by the same hand which first formed it;—that all the blessings and advantages, which are necessary to the happiness and welfare of beings on earth, are only to be derived from the same fountain;—and that the only way to do it, is to secure an interest in his favour, by a grateful expression of our sense for the benefits we have received, and a humble dependence upon him for those we expect and stand in want of.—Whom have we in heaven, says the Psalmist, but thee, O God, to look unto or depend on, to whom shall we pour out our complaints, and speak of all

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our wants and necessities, but to thy goodness, which is ever willing to confer upon us whatever becomes us to ask, and thee to grant;—because thou hast promised to be nigh unto all that call upon thee,—yea, unto all such as call upon thee faithfully;—that thou wilt fulfil the desire of them that fear thee, that thou wilt also hear their cry, and help them.

Of all duties, prayer certainly is the sweetest and most easy.—There are some duties which may seem to occasion a troublesome opposition to the natural workings of flesh and blood;—such as the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies;—others, which will force us unavoidably into a perpetual struggle

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with our passions,—which war against the soul;—such as chastity,—temperance,—humility.—There are other virtues, which seem to bid us forget our present interest for a while,—such as charity and generosity;—others, that teach us to forget it at all times, and wholly to fix our affections on things above, and in no circumstance to act like men that look for a continuing city here, but upon one to come, whose builder and and maker is God.—But this duty of prayer and thanksgiving to God—has no such oppositions to encounter;—it takes no bullock out of thy field,—no horse out of thy stable,—nor he-goat out of thy fold;—it costeth no weariness of bones, no un-

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timely watchings;—it requireth no strength of parts, or painful study, but just to know and have a true sense of our dependance, and of the mercies by which we are upheld :—and with this, in every place and posture of body, a good man may lift up his soul unto the Lord his God.

Indeed, as to the frequency of putting this duty formally in practice, as the precept must necessarily have varied according to the different stations in which God has placed us;—so he has been pleased to determine nothing precisely concerning it :—for, perhaps, it would be unreasonable to expect that the day labourer, or he that supports a numerous family,



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by the sweat of his brow, should spend as much of his time in devotion, as the man of leisure and unbounded wealth.—This, however, in the general, may hold good, that we are bound to pay this tribute to God, as often as his providence has put an opportunity into our hands of so doing;—provided that no plea, drawn from the necessary attention to the affairs of the world, which many men's situations oblige them to, may be supposed to extend to an exemption from paying their morning and evening sacrifice to God.—For it seems to be the least that can be done to answer the demand of our duty in this point,—successively to open and shut up the day in prayer and thank-

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giving;—since there is not a morning thou risest, or a night thou lyest down, but thou art indebted for it to the watchful providence of Almighty God.—David and Daniel, whose names are recorded in Scripture for future example:—the first, though a mighty king, embarrassed with wars abroad, and unnatural disturbances at home; a situation, one would think, would allow little time for any thing but his own and his kingdom's safety;—yet found he leisure to pray *seven times* a day:—the latter, the counsellor and first minister of state to the great Nebuchadnezzar; and though perpetually fatigued with the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and the government of the whole province of

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Babylon, which was committed to his administration;—though near the person of an idolatrous king, and amidst the temptations of a luxurious court,—yet never neglected he his God; but, as we read,—he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before him.

A frequent correspondence with heaven by prayer and devotion, is the greatest nourishment and support of spiritual life:—it keeps the sense of a God warm and lively within us,—which secures our disposition, and sets such guards over us, that hardly will a temptation prevail against us.—Who can entertain a base or an impure thought, or think of executing

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it, who is incessantly conversing with his God?—or not despise every temptation this lower world can offer him, when, by his constant addresses before the throne of God's majesty, he brings the glorious prospect of heaven perpetually before his eyes?

I cannot help here taking notice of the doctrine of those who would resolve all devotion into the inner man, and think that there is nothing more requisite to express our reverence to God, but purity and integrity of heart,—unaccompanied either with words or actions.—To this opinion it may be justly answered,—that, in the present state we are in, we find such a strong sympathy and union between our souls and bodies, that the one



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cannot be touched or sensibly affected, without producing some corresponding emotion in the other.—Nature has assigned a different look, tone of voice, and gesture, peculiar to every passion and affection we are subject to ; and, therefore to argue against this strict correspondence which is held between our souls and bodies,—is disputing against the frame and mechanism of human nature.—We are not angels, but men clothed with bodies, and, in some measure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all these external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts.—And, no doubt, though a virtuous and a good life are more acceptable in the sight of God, than either prayer

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or thanksgiving;—for behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams;—nevertheless, as the one ought to be done, so the other ought not, by any means, to be left undone.—As GOD is to be obeyed,—so he is to be worshipped also.—For although inward holiness and integrity of heart is the ultimate end of the divine dispensations;—yet external religion is a certain means of promoting it.—Each of them has its just bounds;—and therefore, as we would not be so carnal as merely to rest contented with the one,—so neither can we pretend to be so spiritual as to neglect the other.

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And though God is all-wise, and therefore understands our thoughts afar off,—and knows the exact degrees of our love and reverence to him, though we should withhold those outward marks of it;—yet God himself has been graciously pleased to command us to pray to him;—that we might beg the assistance of his grace to work with us against our own infirmities;—that we might acknowledge him to be, what he is, the supreme Lord of the whole world:—that we might testify the sense we have of all his mercies and loving kindness to us,—and confess that he has the propriety of every thing we enjoy.—that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

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Thus much of this duty of prayer in general.—From every individual it may be reasonably expected, from a bare reflection upon his own station, his personal wants, and the daily blessings which he has received in particular;—but, for those blessings bestowed upon the whole species in common,—reason seems further to require, that a joint return should be made by as many of the species as can conveniently assemble together for this religious purpose.—From hence arises, likewise, the reasonableness of public worship, and sacred places set apart for that purpose; without which, it would be very difficult to preserve that sense of God and religion upon the minds of men,



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which is so necessary to their well-being, considered only as a civil society, and with regard to the purposes of this life, and the influence which a just sense of it must have upon their actions.—Besides, men, who are united in societies, can have no other cement to unite them likewise in religious ties, as well as in manners of worship and points of faith, but the institution of solemn times and public places destined for that use.

And it is not to be questioned, that if the time, as well as place, for serving God, were once considered as indifferent, and left so far to every man's choice as to have no calls to public prayer, however a sense of religion might be preserved a while by a

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few speculative men, yet that the bulk of mankind would lose all knowledge of it, and in time live without God in the world.—Not that private prayer is the less our duty, the contrary of which is proved above; and our Saviour says, that when we pray to God in secret, we shall be rewarded openly;—but that prayers which are publicly offered up in God's house, tend more to the glory of God, and the benefit of ourselves:—for this reason, that they are presumed to be performed with greater attention and seriousness, and therefore most likely to be heard with a more favourable acceptance.—And for this, one might appeal to every man's breast, whether he has not been affected with

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the most elevated pitch of devotion, when he gave thanks in the great congregation of the saints, and praised God amongst much people?—Of this united worship there is a glorious description which St. John gives us, in the Revelations, where he supposes the whole universe joining together, in their several capacities, to give glory in this manner to their common Lord.—Every creature which was in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as were in the seas, and all that were in them, heard I, crying,—Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne.

But here it may be asked, that if public worship tends so much to pro-

mote the glory of God,—and is what is so indispensably the duty and benefit of every christian state,—how came it to pass that our blessed Saviour left no command to his followers, throughout the gospel, to set up public places of worship, and keep them sacred for that purpose?—It may be answered,—that the necessity of setting apart places for divine worship, and the holiness of them when thus set apart, seemed already to have been so well established by former revelation, as not to need any express precept upon that subject:—for tho' the particular appointment of the temple, and the confinement of worship to that place alone, were only temporary parts of the Jewish cove-



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nant; yet the necessity and duty of having places somewhere solemnly dedicated to God carried a moral reason with it, and therefore was not abolished with the ceremonial part of the law.—Our Saviour came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law;—and therefore the moral precepts of it, which promoted a due regard to the divine Majesty, remained in as full force as ever.—And accordingly we find it attested, both by christian and heathen writers, that so soon as the second century, when the number of believers was much increased, and the circumstances of rich converts enabled them to do it,—that they began to erect edifices for divine worship;—and though, under the frowns

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and oppression of the civil power, they every Sabbath assembled themselves therein, that with one heart and one lip they might declare whose they were, and whom they served, and, as the servants of one Lord, might offer up their joint prayers and petitions.

I wish there was no reason to lament an abatement of this religious zeal amongst christians of later days.—Though the piety of our forefathers seems, in a great measure, to have deprived us of the merit of building churches for the service of GOD, there can be no such plea for not frequenting them in a regular and solemn manner.—How often do people absent themselves (when in the utmost distress how to dispose of themselves)

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from church, even upon those days which are set apart for nothing else but the worship of God;—when, to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to secular concerns, is a sacrilege almost in the literal sense of the word.

From this duty of public prayer arises another, which I cannot help speaking of, it being so dependent upon it;—I mean a serious, devout and respectful behaviour, when we are performing this solemn duty in the house of God.—This is surely the least that can be necessary in the immediate presence of the Sovereign of the world, upon whose acceptance of our addresses all our present and future happiness depends.

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External behaviour is the result of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to God, whom we are to worship in body as well as spirit.

And as no one should be wanting in outward respect and decorum before an earthly prince or superior, much less should we be so before him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Notwithstanding the obviousness of this branch of duty,—it seems often to be little understood; and whoever will take a general survey of church behaviour, will often meet with scenes of sad variety.—What a vein of indolence and indevotion sometimes seems to run throughout



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whole congregations!—what ill-timed pains do some take in putting on an air of gayety and indifference in the most interesting parts of this duty,—even when they are making confession of their sins, as if they were ashamed to be thought serious with their God!—Surely, to address ourselves to his infinite Majesty after a negligent and dispassionate manner, besides the immediate indignity offered, it is a sad sign we little consider the blessings we ask for, and far less deserve them.—Besides, what is a prayer, unless our heart and affections go along with it?—It is not so much as the shadow of devotion; and little better than the papists telling their beads,—or honouring God

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with their lips, when their hearts are far from him.—The consideration that a person is come to prostrate himself before the throne of high heaven, and in that place which is particularly distinguished by his presence, is sufficient inducement for any one to watch over his imagination, and guard against the least appearance of levity and disrespect.

An inward sincerity will of course influence the outward deportment; but where the one is wanting, there is great reason to suspect the absence of the other.—I own it is possible, and often happens, that this external garb of religion may be worn, when there is little within of a piece with it;—but I believe the converse of

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the proposition can never happen to be true, that a truly religious frame of mind should exist without some outward mark of it.—The mind will shine through the veil of flesh which covers it, and naturally express its religious dispositions; and, if it possesses the power of godliness,—will have the external form of it too.

May God grant us to be defective in neither,—but that we may so praise and magnify God on earth,—that when he cometh, at the last day, with ten thousand of his saints in heaven, to judge the world, we may be partakers of their eternal inheritance. Amen.

THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
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## SERMON XXIX.

The Ways of Providence justified  
to Man.

PSALM lxxiii. 12, 13.

*Behold these are the ungodly who prosper  
in the world, they increase in riches.*

*Verily, I have cleansed my heart in  
vain, and washed my hands in in-  
nocency.*

THIS complaint of the Psalmist's  
concerning the promiscuous di-  
stribution of God's blessings to the  
just and the unjust,—that the sun  
should shine without distinction upon  
the good and the bad,—and rains  
descend upon the righteous and un-

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righteous man,—is a subject that has afforded much matter for inquiry, and at one time or other has raised doubts to dishearten and perplex the minds of men. If the sovereign Lord of all the earth does look on, whence so much disorder in the face of things?—why is it permitted that wise and good men should be left often a prey to so many miseries and distresses of life,—whilst the guilty and foolish triumph in their offences, and even the tabernacles of robbers prosper?

To this it is answered,—that therefore there is a future state of rewards and punishments to take place after this life,—wherein all these inequalities shall be made even, where the circumstances of every man's case shall

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be considered, and where God shall be justified in all his ways, and every mouth shall be stopt.

If this was not so,—if the ungodly were to prosper in the world, and have riches in possession,—and no distinction to be made hereafter,—to what purpose would it have been to have maintained our integrity?—Lo! then, indeed, should I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

It is farther said, and what is a more direct answer to the point,—that when God created man, that he might make him capable of receiving happiness at his hands hereafter,—he endowed him with liberty and freedom of choice, without which he

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could not have been a creature accountable for his actions;—that it is merely from the bad use he makes of these gifts,—that all those instances of irregularity do result, upon which the complaint is here grounded,—which could no ways be prevented, but by the total subversion of human liberty;—that should God make bare his arm, and interpose on every injustice that is committed,—mankind might be said to do what was right,—but at the same time, to lose the merit of it, since they would act under force and necessity, and not from the determinations of their own mind;—that, upon this supposition,—a man could with no more reason expect to go to heaven for acts of tem-



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perance, justice and humanity, than for the ordinary impulses of hunger and thirst, which nature directed;—that God has dealt with man upon better terms;—he has first endowed him with liberty and free-will;—he has set life and death, good and evil, before him;—that he has given him faculties to find out what will be the consequences of either way of acting, and then left him to take which course his reason and discretion shall point out.

I shall desist from enlarging any further upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of God's providence, which are urged so often, with so much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reasonable

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reply ;—since the miseries which befall the good, and the seeming happiness of the wicked, could not be otherwise in such a free state and condition as this in which we are placed.

In all charges of this kind, we generally take two things for granted ;—1st, That in the instances we give, we know certainly the good from the bad ;—and, 2dly, The respective state of their enjoyments or sufferings.

I shall, therefore, in the remaining part of my discourse, take up your time with a short inquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men,—but likewise of knowing either the degrees of

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their real happiness or misery in this life.

The first of these will teach us candour in our judgments of others;—the second, to which I shall confine myself, will teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of God.

For though the miseries of the good, and the prosperity of the wicked, are not in general to be denied;—yet I shall endeavour to shew, that the particular instances we are apt to produce, when we cry out in the words of the Psalmist, Lo! these are the ungodly,—these prosper, and are happy in the world;—I say, I shall endeavour to shew, that we are so ignorant of the articles of the

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charge,—and the evidence we go upon to make them good is so lame and defective,—as to be sufficient by itself to check all propensity to expostulate with God's providence, allowing there was no other way of clearing up the matter reconcileably to his attributes.

And, first,—what certain and infallible marks have we of the goodness or badness of the bulk of mankind?

If we trust to fame and reports,—if they are good, how do we know but they may proceed from partial friendship or flattery?—when bad, from envy or malice, from ill-natured surmises and constructions of things?—and, on both sides, from small



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matters aggrandized through mistake,—and sometimes through the unskilful relation of even truth itself?—From some, or all of which causes, it happens, that the characters of men, like the histories of the Egyptians, are to be received and read with caution;—they are generally dressed out and disfigured with so many dreams and fables, that every ordinary reader shall not be able to distinguish truth from falsehood.—But allowing these reflections to be too severe in this matter,—that no such thing as envy ever lessened a man's character, or malice blackened it;—yet the characters of men are not easily penetrated, as they depend often upon the retired,

unseen part of a man's life.—The best and truest piety is most secret, and the worst of actions, for different reasons, will be so too.—Some men are modest, and seem to take pains to hide their virtues; and, from a natural distance and reserve in their tempers, scarce suffer their good qualities to be known:—others, on the contrary, put in practice a thousand little arts to counterfeit virtues which they have not,—the better to conceal those vices which they really have;—and this under fair shows of sanctity, good-nature, generosity, or some virtue or other,—too specious to be seen through,—too amiable and disinterested to be suspected.—These hints may be sufficient to shew how

hard it is to come at the matter of fact :—but one may go a step further—and say, that even that, in many cases, could we come to the knowledge of it, is not sufficient by itself to pronounce a man either good or bad.—There are numbers of circumstances which attend every action of a man's life, which can never come to the knowledge of the world,—yet ought to be known, and well weighed, before sentence with any justice can be passed upon him.—A man may have different views and a different sense of things from what his judges have ; and what he understands and feels, and what passes within him, may be a secret treasured up deeply there for ever.—A man, through bodily

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infirmity, or some complectional defect, which perhaps is not in his power to correct,—may be subject to inadvertencies,—to starts—and unhappy turns of temper; he may lie open to snares he is not always aware of; or, through ignorance and want of information and proper helps, he may labour in the dark:—in all which cases, he may do many things which are wrong in themselves, and yet be innocent;—at least an object rather to be pitied, than censured with severity and ill-will.—These are difficulties which stand in every one's way in the forming a judgment of the characters of others.—But, for once, let us suppose them all to be got over, so that we could see the bottom of every



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man's heart;—let us allow that the word rogue or honest man, was wrote so legibly in every man's face, that no one could possibly mistake it;—yet still the happiness of both the one and the other, which is the only fact that can bring the charge home, is what we have so little certain knowledge of,—that, bating some flagrant instances,—whenever we venture to pronounce upon it, our decisions are little more than random guesses.—For who can search the heart of man?—it is treacherous even to ourselves, and much more likely to impose upon others.—Even in laughter (if you will believe Solomon) the heart is sorrowful:—*the mind sits drooping, whilst the counte-*

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*nance is gay* :—and even he, who is the object of envy to those who look no further than the surface of his estate,—may appear at the same time worthy of compassion to those who know his private recesses.—Besides this, a man's unhappiness is not to be ascertained so much from what is known to have befallen him,—as from his particular turn and cast of mind, and capacity of bearing it.—Poverty, exile, loss of fame or friends, the death of children, the dearest of all pledges of a man's happiness, make not equal impressions upon every temper.—You will see one man undergo, with scarce the expence of a sigh,—what another, in the bitterness of his soul, would go mourn-

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ing for all his life long:—nay, a hasty word, or an unkind look, to a soft and tender nature, will strike deeper than a sword to the hardened and senseless.—If these reflections hold true with regard to misfortunes,—they are the same with regard to enjoyments:—we are formed differently,—have different tastes and perceptions of things;—by the force of habit, education, or a particular cast of mind,—it happens that neither the use or possession of the same enjoyments and advantages, produce the same happiness and contentment;—but that it differs in every man almost according to his temper and complexion;—so that the self-same happy accidents in life, which shall give

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raptures to the choleric or sanguine man, shall be received with indifference by the cold and phlegmatic ;—and so oddly perplexed are the accounts of both human happiness and misery in this world,—that trifles, light as air, shall be able to make the hearts of some men sing for joy ;—at the same time that others, with real blessings and advantages, without the power of using them, have their hearts heavy and discontented.

Alas ! if the principles of contentment are not within us,—the height of station and worldly grandeur will as soon add a cubit to a man's stature as to his happiness.

This will suggest to us how little a way we have gone towards the



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proof of any man's happiness,—in barely saying,—Lo ! this man prospers in the world,—and this man has riches in possession.

When a man has got much above us, we take it for granted—that he sees some glorious prospects, and feels some mighty pleasures from his height ;—whereas, could we get up to him,—it is great odds whether we should find any thing to make us tolerable amends for the pains and trouble of climbing up so high.—Nothing, perhaps, but more dangers and more trouble still ;—and such a giddiness of head besides, as to make a wise man wish he was well down again upon the level.—To calculate, therefore, the happiness of mankind

by their stations and honours, is the most deceitful of all rules;—— great, no doubt, is the happiness which a moderate fortune, and moderate desires, with a consciousness of virtue, will secure a man.—Many are the silent pleasures of the honest peasant, who rises cheerfully to his labour:—look into his dwelling,—— where the scene of every man's happiness chiefly lies;—he has the same domestic endearments,—as much joy and comfort in his children,—and as flattering hopes of their doing well,—to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the most affluent station.—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true account of his joys and sufferings were to be

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balanced with those of his betters,—that the upshot would prove to be little more than this,—that the rich man had the more meat,—but the poor man the better stomach;—the one had more luxury,—more able physicians to attend and set him to rights;—the other, more health and soundness in his bones, and less occasion for their help;—that, after these two articles betwixt them were balanced,—in all other things they stood upon a level:—that the sun shines as warm,—the air blows as fresh, and the earth breathes as fragrant, upon the one as the other;—and that they have an equal share in all the beauties and real benefits of nature.—These hints may be suf-

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ficient to shew what I proposed from them,—the difficulties which attend us in judging truly either of the happiness or the misery of the bulk of mankind,—the evidence being still more defective in this case (as the matter of fact is hard to come at)—than even in that of judging of their true characters;—of both which, in general, we have such imperfect knowledge, as will teach us candour in our determinations upon each other.

But the main purport of this discourse, is to teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of the Almighty.

That things are dealt unequally in this world, is one of the strongest na-



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tural arguments for a future state,—and therefore is not to be overthrown: nevertheless, I am persuaded the charge is far from being as great as at first sight it may appear;—or if it is,—that our views of things are so narrow and confined, that it is not in our power to make it good.

But suppose it otherwise,—that the happiness and prosperity of bad men were as great as our general complaints make them;—and, what is not the case,—that we were not able to clear up the matter, or answer it reconcileably with God's justice and providence,—what shall we infer?—Why, the most becoming conclusion is,—that it is one instance more, out of many others, of our ignorance:—why

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should this, or any other religious difficulty he cannot comprehend,—why should it alarm him more than ten thousand other difficulties which every day elude his most exact and attentive search?—Does not the meanest flower in the field, or the smallest blade of grass, baffle the understanding of the most penetrating mind? Can the deepest inquiries after nature tell us, upon what particular size and motion of parts the various colours and tastes of vegetables depend;—why one shrub is laxative,—another restraining;—why arsenic or hellebore should lay waste this noble frame of ours,—or opium lock up all the inroads to our senses,—and plunder us in so merciless a manner, of reason and

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understanding?—Nay, have not the most obvious things that come in our way dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and do not the clearest and most exalted understandings find themselves puzzled, and at a loss, in every particle of matter?

Go then,—proud man!—and when thy head turns giddy with opinions of thy own wisdom, that thou wouldst correct the measures of the Almighty,—go then,—take a full view of thyself in this glass;—consider thy own faculties,—how narrow and imperfect;—how much they are checquered with truth and falsehood;—how little arrives at thy knowledge, and how darkly and confusedly thou discernest

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even that little as in a glafs:—confider the beginnings and endings of things, the greateft and the fmalleft, how they all confpire to baffle thee;—and which way ever thou profecutest thy inquiries,—what fresh fubjects of amazement,—and what fresh reafons to believe there are more yet behind which thou canft never comprehend.—Confider,—theſe are but part of his ways;—how little a portion is heard of him? Canft thou, by ſearching, find out God?—wouldft thou know the Almighty to perfection?—’Tis as high as heaven, What canft thou do? —’tis deeper than hell, how canft thou know it?

Could we but ſee the myſterious workings of providence, and were we



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able to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wisdom and goodness, which possibly may be the case in the final consummation of all things;—those events, which we are now so perplexed to account for, would probably exalt and magnify his wisdom, and make us cry out with the Apostle, in that rapturous exclamation,—O! the depth of the riches both of the goodness and wisdom of God!—how unsearchable are his ways, and his paths past finding out!

Now to God, &c.

THE HISTORY OF THE  
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FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
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## SERMON XXX.

### The Ingratitude of Israel.

2 KINGS, xvii. 7.

*For so it was,—that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—*

THE words of the text account for the cause of a sad calamity which is related, in the foregoing verses, to have befallen a great number of Israelites, who were surprised, in the capital city of Samaria, by Hosea king of Assyria, and cruelly carried away by him out of their own country, and placed on the deso-

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late frontiers of Halah, and in Haber, by the river Gozan, and in the city of the Medes, and there confined to end their days in sorrow and captivity.—Upon which the sacred historian, instead of accounting for so sad an event merely from political springs and causes; such, for instance, as the superior strength and policy of the enemy, or an unseasonable provocation given,—or that proper measures of defence were neglected; —he traces it up, in one word, to its true cause:—For so it was, says he, that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—It was surely a sufficient foundation to dread some evil,—that



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they had sinned against that Being who had an unquestionable right to their obedience.—But what an aggravation was it—that they had not only sinned simply against the truth, but against the God of mercies,—who had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt;—who not only created, upheld, and favoured them with so many advantages in common with the rest of their fellow-creatures,—but who had been particularly kind to them in their misfortunes;—who, when they were in the house of bondage, in the most hopeless condition, without a prospect of any natural means of redress, had compassionately heard their cry, and took pity upon the afflictions of a

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distressed people,—and, by a chain of miracles, delivered them from servitude and oppression;—miracles of so stupendous a nature, that I take delight to offer them, as often as I have an opportunity, to your devoutest contemplations.—This, you would think as high and as complicated an aggravation of their sins as could be urged.—This was not all;—for besides God's goodness in first favouring their miraculous escape, a series of successes, not to be accounted for from second causes, and the natural course of events, had crowned their heads in so remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of his general concern for their welfare, but of his

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particular providence and attachment to them above all people upon earth.

—In the wilderness he led them like sheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye: he suffered no man to do them wrong, but reprov'd even kings for their sake. — When they entered into the promised land, — no force was able to stand before them; — when in possession of it, — no army was able to drive them out; — and in a word, nature, for a time, was driven backwards to serve them; and even the sun itself had stood still in the midst of heaven to secure their victories.

A people with so many testimonies of God's favour, who had not profited thereby, so as to become a

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virtuous people, must have been utterly corrupt;—and so they were. — And it is likely, from the many specimens they had given, in Moses's time, of a disposition to forget God's benefits, and upon every trial to rebel against him,—he foresaw they would certainly prove a thankless and unthinking people, extremely inclined to go astray and do evil;—and therefore, if any thing was likely to bring them back to themselves, and to consider the evils of their misdoings,—it must be the dread of some temporal calamity, which, he prophetically threatened, would one day or other befall them:—hoping, no doubt,—that if no principle of gratitude could make



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them an obedient people, — at least they might be wrought upon by the terror of being reduced back again by the the same all-powerful hand to their first distressed condition; — which, in the end, did actually overtake them. — For at length, when neither the alternatives of promises or threatenings, — when neither rewards or corrections, — comforts or afflictions, could soften them; — when continual instructions, — warnings, — invitations, — reproofs, — miracles, — prophets and holy guides, had no effect, but instead of making them grow better, apparently made them grow worse, — God's patience at length withdrew, — and he suffered them to reap the wages of their folly,

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by letting them fall into the state of bondage from whence he had first raised them;—and that not only in that partial instance of those in Samaria, who were taken by Hosea, —but, I mean, in that more general instance of their overthrow by the army of the Chaldeans;—wherein he suffered the whole nation to be led away, and carried captive into Nineveh and Babylon.—We may be assured, that the history of God Almighty's just dealings with this forward and thoughtless people——was not wrote for nothing;—but that it was given as a loud call and warning of obedience and gratitude, for all races of men to whom the light of revelation should hereafter reach:—

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and therefore I have made choice of this subject, as it seems likely to furnish some reflections seasonable for the beginning of this week,—which should be devoted to such meditations as may prepare and fit us for the solemn fast which we are shortly to observe, and whose pious intention will not be answered by a bare assembling ourselves together, without making some religious and national remarks suitable to the occasion. —Doubtless, there is no nation which ever had so many extraordinary reasons and supernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous, as the Jews had;—which, besides the daily blessings of God's providence to them, has not received sufficient blessings

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and mercies at the hands of God, so as to engage their best services, and the warmest returns of gratitude they can pay.

There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from some grievous calamity,—from the rage of pestilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the sword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preserved by providential discoveries of plots and designs against the well-being of their states, or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to sink,—by some signal interposition of God's providence, they may have rescued their liberties, and all that was dear to—



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them, from the jaws of some tyrant ;  
 —or may have preserved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—If other countries have reason to be thankful to God for any one of these mercies, —much more has this of ours,—which, at one time or other, has received them all;—insomuch that our history, for this last hundred years, has scarce been any thing but the history of our deliverances and God's blessings;—and these in so complicated a chain, such as were scarce ever vouchsafed to any people besides, except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the stupendous manner of their working,—yet no way so—in the extensive goodness of

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their effects, and the infinite benevolence and power which must have wrought them for us.

Here then let us stop to look back a moment, and inquire what great effects all this has had upon our sins, and how far worthy we have lived of what we have received.

A stranger, when he heard that this island had been so favoured by heaven,—so happy in our laws and religion,—so flourishing in our trade,—and so blessed in our situation,—and so visibly protected in all of them by providence,—would conclude, that our morals had kept pace with these blessings, and would expect that, as we were the most favoured by God Almighty, we must be the most vir-

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tuous and religious people upon earth.

Would to God, there was any other reason to incline one to such a belief!—would to God, that the appearance of religion was more frequent! for that would necessarily imply the reality of it somewhere, and most probably in the greatest and most respectable characters of the nation.—Such was the situation of this country, till a licentious king introduced a licentious age.—The court of Charles the Second first brake in upon, and, I fear, has almost demolished the out-works of religion, of modesty, and of sober manners—so that, instead of any real marks of religion amongst us, you see thousands

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who are tired with carrying the mass of it,—and have thrown it aside as a useless incumbrance.

But this licentiousness, he'll say, may be chiefly owing to a long course of prosperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has since tried you with afflictions;—you have had lately a bloody and expensive war;—God has sent, moreover, a pestilence amongst your cattle, which has cut off the stock from the fold and left no herd in the stalls;—besides,—you have just felt two dreadful shocks in your metropolis of a most terrifying nature;—which, if God's providence had not checked and restrained within some bounds, might have overthrown your capital, and your kingdom with it.



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Surely, he'll say,—all these warnings must have awakened the consciences of the most unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land, from such admonitions, to have learned righteousness.—I own, this is the natural effect,—and, one should hope, should always be the improvement from such calamities;—for we often find, that numbers of people, who, in their prosperity, seemed to forget God,—do yet remember him in the days of trouble and distress;—yet, consider this nationally,—we see no such effect from it, as, in fact, one would expect from speculation.

For instance, with all the devastation and bloodshed which the war

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has occasioned,—how many converts has it made either to virtue or frugality?—The pestilence amongst our cattle, though it has distressed, and utterly undone, so many thousands; yet what one visible alteration has it made in the course of our lives?

And though, one would imagine, that the necessary drains of taxes for the one, and the loss of rent and property from the other,—should, in some measure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our passions as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongst us that it is so;—what one fashionable folly or extravagance has been checked?—Are not the same expences of equipage, and furniture, and dress,—the same order of diver-

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sions, perpetually returning, and as great luxury and epicurism of entertainments, as in the most prosperous condition?—So that, though the head is sick, and the whole heart is faint, we will affect to look well in the face, either as if nothing had happened, or we were ashamed to acknowledge the force and natural effects of the chastisements of God.—And if, from the effects which war and pestilence have had,—we may form a judgment of the moral effects which this last terror is likely to produce,—it is to be feared, however we might be startled at first,—that the impressions will scarce last longer than the instantaneous shock which occasioned them : —And I make no doubt,—should a

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man have courage to declare his opinion,—“ That he believed it was an indication of GOD’s anger upon a corrupt generation,”—that it would be great odds but he would be pitied for his weakness, or openly laughed at for his superstition.—Or if, after such a declaration,—he was thought worth setting right in his mistakes,—he would be informed,—that religion had nothing to do in explications of this kind;—that all such violent vibrations of the earth were owing to subterraneous caverns falling down of themselves, or being blown up by nitrous and sulphureous vapours rarified by heat;—and that it was idle to bring in the Deity to untie the knot, when it can be resolved easily into natural



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causes.—Vain unthinking mortals!—  
As if natural causes were any thing  
else in the hands of God,—but in-  
struments which he can turn to work  
the purposes of his will, either to re-  
ward or punish, as seems fitting to  
his infinite wisdom.

Thus no man repenteth him of  
his wickedness, saying,—What have  
I done?—but every one turneth to  
his course, as a horse rusheth into  
the battle.—To conclude, however  
we may under-rate it now,—it is a  
maxim of eternal truth,—which both  
reasonings and all accounts from his-  
tory confirm,—that the wickedness  
and corruption of a people will sooner  
or later always bring on temporal

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mischiefs and calamities.—And can it be otherwise?—for a vicious nation not only carries the seeds of destruction within, from the natural workings and course of things,—but it lays itself open to the whole force and injury of accidents from without;—and I do venture to say,—there never was a nation or people fallen into troubles or decay,—but one might justly leave the same remark upon them which the sacred historian makes in the text upon the misfortunes of the Israelites,—for so it was,—that they had sinned against the Lord their God.

Let us, therefore, constantly bear in mind that conclusion of the

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facred writer,—which I shall give you in his own beautiful and awful language :

“ But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a stretch'd-out arm, him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship,—and to him shall ye do sacrifice :—And the statutes, and the ordinances, and the commandments he wrote for you, ye shall observe to do for evermore.—The Lord your God ye shall fear,—and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

Now to God the Father, &c.

F I N I S.





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